

**Thanksgiving Service 2007**  
**Readings and Reflections**  
**November 18, 2007**

***The Story of the Horn of Plenty***

Compiled by Kent Hemmen Saleska

Read by Andrea Heier

One of the traditional symbols of Thanksgiving is the Cornucopia, otherwise known as the “Horn of Plenty.” It is a symbol of bounty, of generosity and abundance. Like many symbols and words we use today though, the Cornucopia has a very ancient history.

A long time ago, people believed in a very powerful God by the name of Zeus. But even before that, when Zeus was a baby, he had a babysitter by the name of Amalthea. Amalthea took care of Zeus, and played with him and fed him. Today, we most often drink milk that comes from cows. But a long time ago people had a lot of goats, and so the milk they drank was from goats. And that’s what Amalthea did: when she fed Zeus, she most often gave him milk from a goat.

The story about Zeus is told a little differently depending on who tells it. Some people say that once, when he was baby playing with the goat, Zeus accidentally broke off one of the goat’s horns. Other people say Zeus broke off the horn on purpose when he was an adult. But no matter how the horn got broken, the story goes on to say that in gratitude for she did for him, Zeus gave the horn to Amalthea, the woman who had been his babysitter. Because he was such a powerful god, he also gave the horn a special power. He promised that whoever owned the horn would always have everything they desired in abundance.

Another part of the story also says that as an additional part of his gratitude, Zeus set the goat’s image in the sky, and that is what gave us the constellation of Capricorn.

The word “cornucopia” is actually made up of two Latin words: “cornu,” which is another word for “cone” or “horn,” and “copiae,” which is another word for “lots and lots of stuff.” So the word we use today literally means “a horn that is filled with lots and lots of stuff”! Because the horn is usually seen filled with lots and lots of fruit and vegetables, it became connected to the abundance of food we usually harvest in the fall. Then later, because it was a symbol for harvest time, it also became connected to what we now call “Thanksgiving.”

***Uncle Harry's Thanksgiving Bread***  
**An often-shared story (unknown author at this time)**

For many families Thanksgiving is a very special holiday, a time when relatives gather to share a special meal. And children especially often look forward to festivities. So it was with the Osgood family. Scott and Jenny loved to visit their Aunt Ruth and Uncle Harry for Thanksgiving. All the family would be there, and there would be lots of good food, family games and a story or two from Uncle Harry.

Everyone who came for dinner brought something for the big meal. So even before they took off their coats, Scott and Jenny carried their sweet potatoes and corn pudding to the kitchen to add to the other yummy things. On the counter in the kitchen was a large round loaf of bread, Uncle Harry's special bread that he made every Thanksgiving. Just looking at it made you hungry. It had the warm, inviting smell of fresh yeast bread, and peeking through the rich brown crust were nuts and colorful fruits. It was irresistible. Scott put down the sweet potatoes he carried and in the same motion swept his hand over the top of the bread, aiming for a bright red cherry sticking out of the top crust.

“Stop!” cried Uncle Harry. “Don't touch that bread. It took a thousand people to make that loaf of bread.”

Scott pulled back his hand without taking the piece of cherry. “It did?” he asked. “How could it?”

“Maybe even more than a thousand,” said Uncle Harry thoughtfully. “Go take your coats off and we'll figure it out.”

While they hung their coats in the hall closet, Uncle Harry went to get a pad of paper and a marker. “All right,” he said as they settled on the family room couch. “What's the first thing you think of that goes into making bread?”

“Flour!” cried Jenny and Scott, both at the same time.

“Right,” said Uncle Harry. “And where do you think I got the flour?”

“At the store, of course,” said Jenny.

“And does the store run itself?” asked Uncle Harry innocently. “How did the flour get itself onto the shelf for me to buy?”

“They have people who stock the shelves,” said Jenny, who was beginning to understand.

Uncle Harry began his list. On the top he wrote “me” and under that he wrote “stockboy.”

“Who else at the store had something to do with my flour?” he asked. And with the children’s help he added manager, cashier and bagger to the list. “Now,” Uncle Harry asked, “Did they make the flour at the store?” The children shook their heads “no.”

“How did it get there?”

“A big truck delivered it,” offered Scott, who was very interested in trucks these days. “A trucker brought it: add trucker to your list.” And so Uncle Harry did. Together they added many more as they traced the flour back to the farm where it had first grown as wheat. There were the warehouse workers, the train crew, the loaders, the workers at the flour mill and grain elevator, the farm workers who ran the harvesters that cut the wheat.

And then Uncle Harry asked, “What about the trains and the trucks and the machinery? We wouldn’t have this flour without them. Who built them?” And the list grew with designers, inventors, bricklayers, machinists...on and on.

When they ran short of ideas they had filled three pages on Uncle Harry’s pad, almost a hundred people in all. “Well,” said Uncle Harry, “so much for the flour.” Now about the eggs and the sugar and the spices and the fruit and the nuts and the butter and the yeast and the...”

“Stop!” said Scott. “You win! We won’t even have enough paper to write down all those people. I guess it really did take more than a thousand people to make that bread. And I always thought it was your special bread.”

“Well, it is,” said Uncle Harry, “but Thanksgiving always reminds me of how I couldn’t bake my special bread without the help of thousands of other people.”

“When we hold hands around the table today and say what we each are thankful for, I’m going to say, “for the thousands of people who helped prepare this meal for us,” said Jenny, who had been listening intently. “Do you think Mom and Dad will understand?”

“Yes,” said Uncle Harry, “I think they will.”

***An Attitude of Thankfulness***  
**A Thanksgiving Reflection by David Wood, Congregation Member**  
**UU Church of Minnetonka**  
**November 18, 2007**

In our church, we don't say, "Let us pray." Instead, appreciating that many of us believe in differing higher power concepts, and desiring to be inclusive, we say, "Let us join together in an attitude of prayer." Individually, we know what that means. And so, when we talk about giving thanks, for some, a fair question might be "to whom?" After all, when we're feeling especially thankful about something, is it really necessary that we look skyward and reverently whisper "thank you?" Asking this question is not in any way intended to slight that way of experiencing thankfulness. However you do it, being in an "attitude of thankfulness" comes out meaning pretty much the same thing.

For me, there are those moments when it dawns on me that being alive is actually worth the trouble. Not the little moments, like when your favorite sports team pulls out a sweet victory over a bitter rival, or your stock portfolio has a big advance, or you make a sale, or get a raise. These are cool, little feel-good moments calling for little thank-yous, or maybe high-fives. But rather, the big moments, like when you reflect upon how meaningful certain people are in your life, and how much you love them; or, when something stirs your passion so intensely that you experience a profound sense of aliveness, and perhaps even spontaneously shed tears of joy.

If there are those people who are able to keep such thoughts foremost in their minds at all times, then what rich lives they must lead. Most of us, I suspect, don't, which makes it especially important that we mark on our calendars a time for honoring such things.

*The Night 'Fore Thanksgiving: A Kitchen Tool Puppet Show*

By Jake Bohstedt

Read by Andrea Heier and Kent Hemmen Saleska

Tw'as the night 'fore Thanksgiving and nothing was stirring  
The birds didn't [whistle] and the cat wasn't purring  
Outside, leaves were down, it would be winter soon  
And cumulus clouds sailed past the full moon

Which sent a faint light shining in the church kitchen  
Where all at once came a voice: "Don't you know, I'm just itching  
To get into action, stir up this simple feast  
To mix butter with potatoes, and flour with yeast."

The voice came from a drawer that had been left half-open  
And another voice spoke, "You know, I was hopin'  
To sleep through the night—tomorrow's a big day  
Much more work for a ladel than a spoon, I would say.  
A ladel must not only stir like a spoon—it must pour!  
And not soup alone, but gravy, mull-wine, and more.

Then, a third voice piped up: "It's not how much you stir  
What's important is a lightness of touch, Ladel, sir.  
A whisk doesn't make potatoes, soup, hearty broth,  
A whisk has one job—to beat egg-whites to a froth.  
Without my work, the cookies and cake would be gluey  
Would be thick in the mouth, would be dreadfully chewy  
Yes, it takes a brisk whisking to set things aright  
Thanksgiving comes down to a certain quality of egg-whites."

The wooden spoon spoke: "If you'll both please excuse  
The humble opinion of a thing that is used  
For just about every meal all the year through.  
Thanksgiving is the time when they dust off both of you.  
But Thanksgiving is meant for simple food, simple gratitude  
Simple getting-together, not some high-blown attitude."

Said the ladel, "You may be right, Spoon, my dear friend,  
About gratitude and Thanksgiving, but you've reached the wrong end.  
It's not simple things that stir up utmost regard,  
It is generous portions in a life that is sometimes hard.  
It's finding kindness and comfort when you're just flat-out tired (tahrd).  
Without even asking, the world brings many gifts  
To nourish our spirits when we need a lift.  
If there's one thing to give thanks for, one thing we should praise,  
It is bountiful portions of life through our days."

“Such treacle,” said Whisk. “Such abominable piddle,  
Simplicity? Bounty? You aim for the middle  
of things—the quotidian—I hit the tip-top  
I give thanks for the remarkable, the unique, the one-of-a-kind, the  
extraordinary, the supercalifragilisticxpealidotious, one-in-a-million,  
never-before-seen-or-heard-of fantastical, amazing, incredible,  
get-out-of-the-way-Jack because this is not your father’s oldsmobile,  
buy-one-get two free fantabuloso extravaganza.”

(runs out of breath looks around, embarrassed)  
“Ahem, excuse me. I do forget myself sometimes.

Well in any case, my thanks is for these sorts of things  
And to hear of simplicity and bounty, to my ears just rings  
Of false piety, put-on and made-up for politeness’s sake.  
As for me, I’ll give thanks for the frosting, not the cake.  
I’ll give thanks for the moments that pierce you right through  
Not the humdrum and mundane as you claim to do.”

“Simplicity!” said Spoon. “Bounty,” said Ladel.  
“The fantastic,” shouted Whisk so loud that Phone fell from its cradle.  
“Enough,” cried another voice. “That’ll do, you three. Stop!”  
And out of the broom closet came trusty ol’ Mop.  
“Now, I’ve been around long enough,” Mop began,  
“To have picked up a thing or two. Let me say what I can.”

Spoon, Ladel, and Whisk? Well they all began sighing.  
Mop was known through the kitchen for dull speechifying.

“Now simplicity is a blessing,” said Mop, “That is true,”  
“But simplicity without bounty is like socks without shoes.  
And simple bounty alone won’t get us through this world  
Without the dash the pizzazz, with what gives us a whirl.  
All three are needed, not just two and not one.”  
And then Mop fell silent, as suddenly as he’d begun.

But our friends Spoon, Whisk, and Ladel had all learned a lesson  
They’d carry with them as a holiday blessin’.  
And the whole next day through, as folks gathered at the table,  
The three kitchen tools wished them the wisdom of this Thanksgiving Fable.

***Giving Thanks...for Simplicity, Bounty and Pizzazz!***  
**Kent Hemmen Saleska, Minister**  
**UU Church of Minnetonka**  
**November 18, 2007**

Ahhh...it is good to be reminded of the great life lessons we can learn from kitchen utensils!

And it occurs to me that we have here quite the vast array of our own brand of kitchen utensils. We meet together here in common worship from many different backgrounds. We have such variety here in this congregation, people who come from backgrounds that are Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, and other Protestant religions. We are people who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, and straight. The lineage of our people comes from ancient tribes on all the seven continents. People who call themselves Christians and Pagans, Theists and Atheists, Humanists, Mystics and Scientists gather in this room each Sunday to join together in a communal celebration of awe and reverence before all we value and hold dear.

We engage a broad spectrum here. As a well-stocked kitchen drawer full of kitchen tools, we have utensils among us who say the most important thing is to live simply, for that is where the heart can be most clear and honest. We have other utensils who say it is important to recognize when we have more than enough, and to be grateful for surprises. And then there are the utensils who say life just isn't life unless it is full of pizzazz, full of art and flourish, full of the brilliant creativity that goes above and beyond the mundane aspects of our lives.

Yet, in good, solid Unitarian Universalist fashion, I appreciate the wisdom of the mop. The mop sees the wisdom and the value in all three perspectives, in all three approaches, and more:

“Now simplicity is a blessing,” said Mop, “That is true,”  
“But simplicity without bounty is like socks without shoes.  
And simple bounty alone won't get us through this world  
Without the dash the pizzazz, with what gives us a whirl.  
All three are needed, not just two and not one.”  
And then Mop fell silent, as suddenly as he'd begun.

I believe that no one kitchen utensil – or any one person – knows the whole story about where we came from or why we are here. But we each have a part of the story. We each know at least a little bit about the truth.

Some of the members of this congregation have been here since it began 47 years ago. Some people joined a month ago. Some future members may even be joining us for the first time today! Some people here are very old and move very slowly, and other people here are very young and move very quickly. I like to think that each of us carries a piece of valid and important information about what it means to visit or belong here.

I like the Quaker way of understanding a religious community. In the Quaker tradition, the belief is that a God made humans in the image of God. Because of that, they believe that each person has a divine spark, a piece of God, inside them, as part of the ingredients of their existence. That in itself is a beautiful way to see other people, but then they take it another step.

When they need to make decisions, they gather together and listen to each other closely because they believe – because of that divine spark in each person – that the voice of God speaks through the voices of the people. All the people.

Here in this church, we may or may not believe in a God, or that God speaks through people, but I think we can understand how each person speaks with a piece of the whole truth. This is why I believe it is important to speak up about things that are important to us, and why I believe it is important to listen when other people share what is important to them. This is also why, if we are angry or frustrated with someone, I believe it is important to talk directly to that person first. If we don't know how someone else feels about us or what we do, then there is nothing we can do about it. But if they come to us and tell us, then we have the potential to build or repair our relationship and move forward together.

That's why I like the story about the spoon, the ladle and the whisk. Those three kitchen utensils have been together a long time. They have worked side by side for many years, and yet they are not afraid to say what they think. Of course, they get into a little bit of trouble when they start yelling too much and not listening enough, but the mop helps them understand how much they are each valuable in the work of the kitchen and how they need each other.

And so, in this season of giving thanks, I am thankful for people who have opinions that are different from mine;

Though I prefer calm and patient conversation, I am also thankful for disagreements – if they come from the heart and if they don't turn hurtful – because sometimes when people disagree more honest feelings come out;

I am thankful for my calling to ministry, for this work, for being here with you today, for every day I am with you;

I am thankful for having meaningful work when so many people in the world have no work at all;

I am thankful for my food when so many in the world have no food at all;

I am thankful for friends, those who have gone, those who are yet to be, and those who are with me now;

I am thankful for my wife, Heidi;

I am thankful for my beautiful one-year-old son, Parker;

I am thankful for having love in my life because sometimes I have lived without love, even times without love for myself;

I am thankful for the people who fed me when I was hungry, clothed me when I was naked, and visited me in the prisons of my own making;

I am thankful for pain because it helps me to remember that I still care, and I am thankful for happiness because it helps me get through the times of pain;

I am thankful for undeserved forgiveness and unexpected grace;

I am thankful for snowflakes and mosquitoes, the cracks in the sidewalks, the veins on a leaf, a folded umbrella, a splash of red paint, the wrinkles on the back of a hand, a broken window, a stuffed animal, a fuzzy blanket, big blue eyes, a runny nose and poopy diapers;

Though I never asked to be born, I am so thankful to be alive and be able to experience the heartbreaking beauty of this glorious, tough, fragile, fleeting life.